

Decision Memo

Turpin Creek Salvage

Project ID#58401

U.S. Forest Service

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &
Thunder Basin National Grassland
Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District
Carbon County, Wyoming

BACKGROUND

June 6, 2020 a tornado touched down in the Northern Snowy Range uprooting and wind throwing trees along Forest Service Road 100 approximately 13 miles southwest of Arlington, Wyoming. The project area, which is in Carbon County, is approximately 900 acres; however, treatments/activities are planned on roughly 600 acres. The legal description for the project area is described as T17N R81W, Sections 13, 24 and 25, T17N R80W, Sections 4, 8, 9, 18, and 19, T18N R80W, Sections 24, 34 and 35, T19N R79W, Sections 8, 17, and 18. 6th principal meridian. While there are non-Forest Service lands adjacent to, within, and in the vicinity of the project area, activities proposed for this project would only occur on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

The Turpin Creek Salvage project area was designated as part of an insect and disease treatment project in accordance with Title VI, Section 602, of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), as amended by Section 8204 of the Agriculture Act (Farm Bill) of 2014. The majority of the Snowy Range mountains were designated March 22nd, 2017.

Management Areas (MA) 5.13 and 5.15 in the Medicine Bow Forest Plan (as amended) cover all NFS lands where activities are proposed in the project area.

PURPOSE AND NEED

USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region Forest Health Protection and Medicine Bow-Routt and Thunder Basin (MBRTB) silviculture staff have determined the site poses a significant insect and disease threat. Windthrown spruce provides suitable habitat for spruce beetle *Dendroctonus rufipennis*. Spruce beetle populations can accumulate in downed material and in following years when this food source has been exhausted, they may then infest neighboring standing live mature spruce.

Other insect species of concern include western balsam bark beetle and Ips beetle (engraver beetles). These beetles pose a less significant threat to the surrounding forest but are known to cause significant tree mortality in high populations.

The objectives of the Turpin Creek Salvage proposed action are to:

- Reduce the risk or extent of, or increase resilience to, **insect or disease infestations** in the project area by improving resiliency of stand structure, function, composition, age and diversity;
- Modify potential **uncharacteristic wildfire behavior** by creating vegetation and fuel conditions that provide for more effective and safer firefighter response;
- Provide for improved public access and safety by removing hazards along open Forest System Roads.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposal is to mitigate the forest insect threat by treating or removing the windthrown host material. Treatments will most likely include a combination of actions listed below and may include temporary road construction to access treatments.

Actions may include:

COMMERCIAL LOGGING

- Harvesting trees on site using mechanized equipment and/or hand felling with chainsaws, skidding material to landing site using rubber-tired skidders or tracked equipment, processing and decking material at the landing site, and hauling the material off the forest.
- Harvesting trees on site using mechanized equipment and/or hand felling with chainsaws, skidding material to landing site using rubber-tired skidders or tracked equipment, processing and piling material at the landing site to be burned during winter months.

SERVICE CONTRACT

- Cutting host material into 18-inch sections using chainsaws, then placing (scattering) the material in a manner to accelerate drying.
- Cutting host material into manageable pieces using chainsaws, piling the cut material, and burning the piles during winter months.

One or a combination of treatments listed above with the addition of using spruce beetle pheromone attractants applied to material designated to be removed from the site or destroyed prior to the beetle's emergence.

Slash created from any action list above may be addressed by piling and burning or leaving on site and lopping the slash to lie within 24" of the ground. Any temporary roads or skid trails created will be rehabilitated using a combination of covering with slash and/or water bars to reduce unauthorized use and reduce impacts or water runoff.

DECISION

I have decided to implement the Turpin Creek Salvage Project in order to mitigate the threat posed by the spruce beetle. My decision also includes the Design Elements and Monitoring Requirements described in *Appendix A*. These activities are in compliance with law, regulation and policy, to include the Medicine Bow Forest Plan (as amended). In addition, all projects will be reviewed internally by resource specialists to provide additional mitigation measures as necessary. Reviews would be documented and included in the project record.

Vegetation management activities include regeneration harvest, intermediate harvest, uneven aged harvest and fuels treatments. Planned treatments may occur anywhere within the project area, considering the design elements as described *Appendix A*.

Additionally, post-harvest treatment activities including piling of slash by machine or hand, site preparation, understory thinning and/or pile burning may occur to achieve desired stand conditions after harvest treatments are completed.

Road management activities are required for implementation of the vegetation and fuel management activities. Anticipated activities would include routine maintenance, road repair and reconstruction of existing national

forest system roads. No new permanent roads will be constructed. Construction of approximately 4 miles of temporary roads would occur and these temporary roads will be decommissioned within 3 years of project completion.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species –
 - Threatened Species- Canada Lynx
 - Over 90% of the project area falls within two Lynx Analysis Units (LAU), which contain suitable lynx habitat.
 - Regional Sensitive Species- Wood frog
 - The Turpin Creek project area contains multiple breeding sites and other important habitat for the Wood frog. As such, additional and more restrictive design elements are included in *Appendix A* to maintain the viability of the Wood frog populations.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – Although there are no municipal watersheds or designated public water supplies in the project area. Any floodplains or wetlands adjacent to or within the proposed treatment units will be protected through project design and design elements in *Appendix A*. It is expected that project related sediment impacts to stream channels, floodplains, and wetland areas will be negligible with the application of buffers, use of best management practices and not exceeding established thresholds for treatments.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None of these exist within the analysis area and will not be affected by the project.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – None of these exist within the analysis area and will not be affected by the project.
- Research natural areas – None of these exist within the analysis area and will not be affected by the project.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious; Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – Cultural resource surveys were completed in areas that were accessible due to large amounts of blowdown in the planning effort. Any sites that were identified during these surveys will be avoided during the implementation of the project. The project, as proposed, would have no effect on cultural properties.
- Special interest areas – The kettle ponds SAI are adjacent to or within the proposed treatment units will be protected through project design and design elements in *Appendix A*.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION

This activity falls within a category of actions which normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This category of actions is identified in Section 603 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591b) and 36 CFR 220.6(e)(20).

Projects using Section 603 of HFRA must meet the following requirements:

- The project is in an area designated in accordance with section 602(b) and (c) of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.
- The project is limited to areas in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) or, if outside the WUI, must be in Condition Classes 2 or 3 Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III.
- The project is not located: in congressionally designated Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas; in areas where the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited by act of Congress or by Presidential proclamation; or in areas where the activities described above would be inconsistent with the applicable Land and Resource Management Plan.
- The project's number of acres treated may not exceed 3,000 acres.
- The project does not include the establishment of permanent roads. Necessary maintenance and repairs on existing permanent roads are permissible.
- Temporary roads constructed will be decommissioned no later than three years after the date the project is completed.
- Public notice and scoping will be conducted.
- The best available scientific information is considered to maintain or restore ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring the structure, function, composition and connectivity.
- The project maximizes the retention of old growth and large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote stands that are resilient to insect and disease.
- The project is developed and implemented through a collaborative process.

In addition to using Section 603 of HFRA for this project, 36 CFR 220.6(e)(20) is also being utilized for this project. This category applies to:

“Activities that restore, rehabilitate, or stabilize lands occupied by roads and trails, excluding National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails to a more natural condition that may include removing, replacing, or modifying drainage structures and ditches, reestablishing vegetation, reshaping natural contours and slopes, reestablishing drainage-ways, or other activities that would restore site productivity and reduce environmental impacts. Examples include but are not limited to:

- (i) Decommissioning a road that is no longer a National Forest System road to a more natural state by restoring natural contours and removing construction fills, loosening compacted soils, revegetating the roadbed and removing ditches and culverts to reestablish natural drainage patterns
- (ii) Restoring an unauthorized trail to a natural state by reestablishing natural drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, reestablishing vegetation, and installing water bars; and
- (iii) Installing boulders, logs, and berms on an unauthorized road segment to promote naturally regenerated grass, shrub, and tree growth.”

These categories of actions are applicable because the project meets all the required criteria. Therefore, I am categorically excluding the described project from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND CONSISTENCY WITH LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

National Forest Management Act

This project is consistent with the Medicine Bow National Forest Land Management Plan (2003), including direction for the Pass Creek and Bow River Geographic Areas, and Management Areas 5.13 (Forest Products) and 5.15- (Forest Products-Ecological Maintenance and Restoration considering the Historic Range of Variability). The project locations were subject to interdisciplinary review and areas of concern were avoided.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

As displayed in the Extraordinary Circumstances section, the Forest Service determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, Canada lynx. No federally listed threatened or endangered fish or plant species occur in the project area. No designated critical habitat for wildlife, fish, or rare plants occurs in the project area. Informal consultation concerning the Canada Lynx was completed with the aid of the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment Screening tools. These tools confirmed the analysis that project implementation may affect but is not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx.

Wyoming State Water Quality Standards and Clean Water Act (CWA)

NPDES permits for logging roads are not necessary; however, any other necessary permits will be obtained prior to implementation. The resource protection measures for Soils, Hydrology and Aquatics, outlined in the Design Elements section, will protect water quality. Thus, the project is consistent with these regulatory requirements.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Heritage resource survey will be completed for all treated areas where activities are proposed or where other project-related disturbance may occur. Adverse effects to historic properties will be avoided through design elements. No change in the proposal is required. Per the 2009 (Amended 2014) Programmatic Agreement among the WY USFS, WY SHPO and the ACHP Regarding Compliance with the NHPA, Stipulation IV.G, project notification will be sent to SHPO prior to project implementation. No concurrence from SHPO is required because this project will have No Adverse Effect on historic sites. If any cultural materials are discovered during construction, work in the area shall halt immediately, the federal agency and SHPO staff contacted, and the materials evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Use of the categorical exclusion requires public notice. Notice of potential for a project in the Turpin Creek Salvage project area will sent to potentially interested parties, to include landowners within or adjacent to the project area and pertinent local/state governments and agencies. This project was listed as a proposal on the Medicine Bow National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions on June 25, 2020 and the [project webpage](https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58401) (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58401>) was updated periodically during the project development process. The scoping period was initiated on Month day year and concluded on Month day year, but comments were still accepted until signed decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are not subject to an administrative review process (pre-decisional objection process) (Agriculture Act of 2014, Subtitle A, Sec. 8006).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Project implementation may begin immediately but is planned to begin in Spring 2021.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Keith Brugger, Supervisory Forester, Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District, 2171 S. Hwy 130, Saratoga, WY 82331, 307-326-2528

Jason M. Armbruster
District Ranger

Date

MAPS

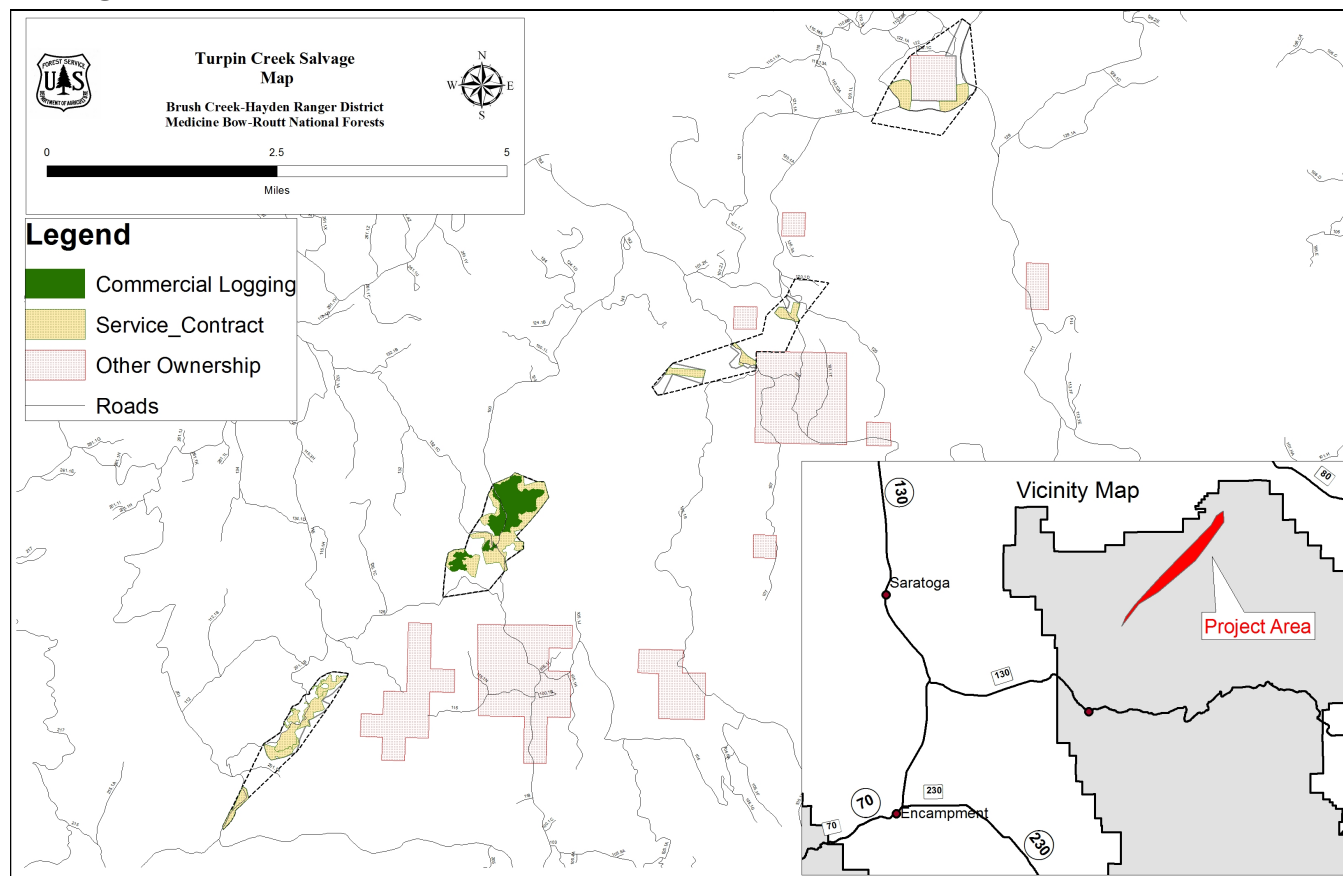


Figure 1. Vicinity Map

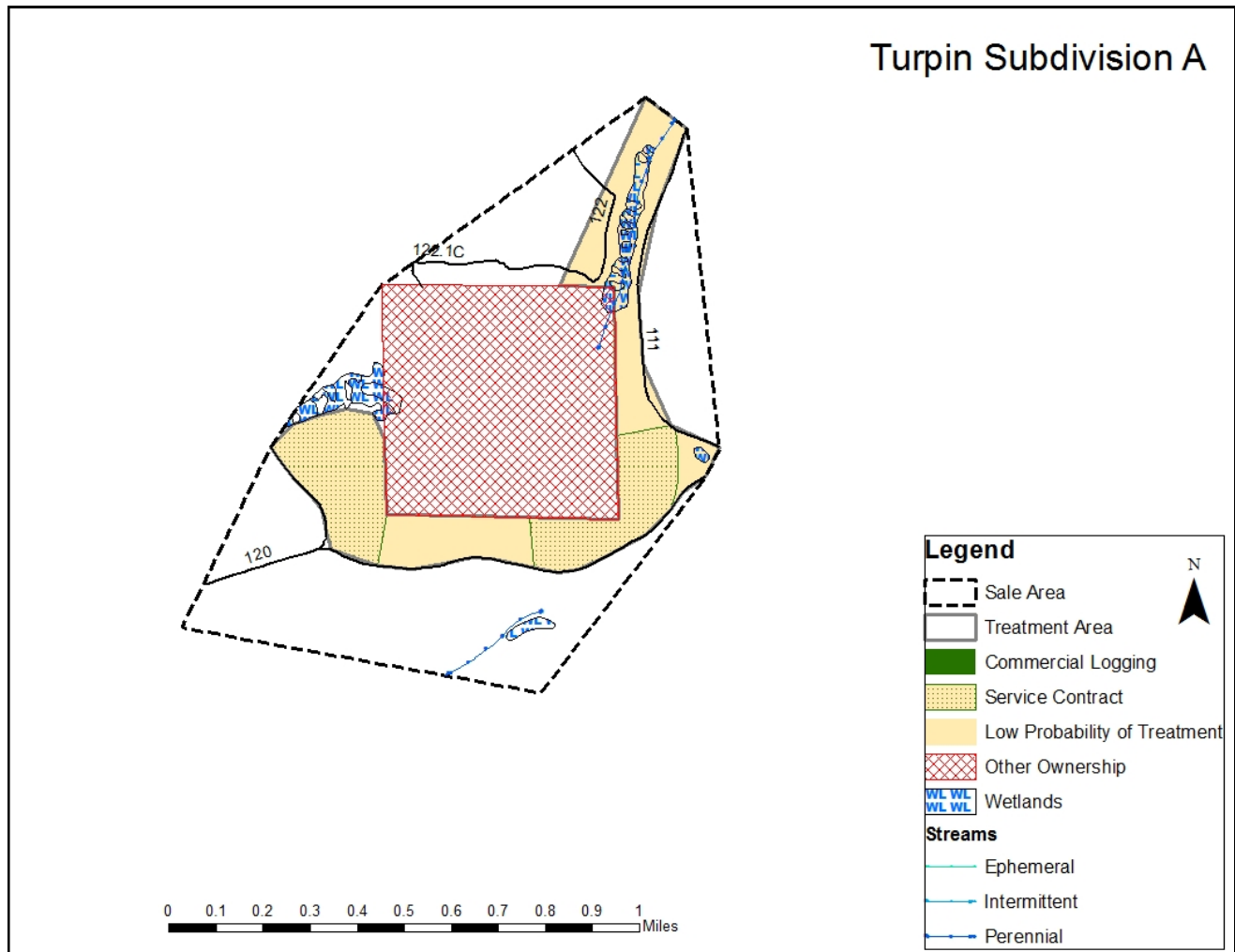


Figure 2. Turpin Subdivision A

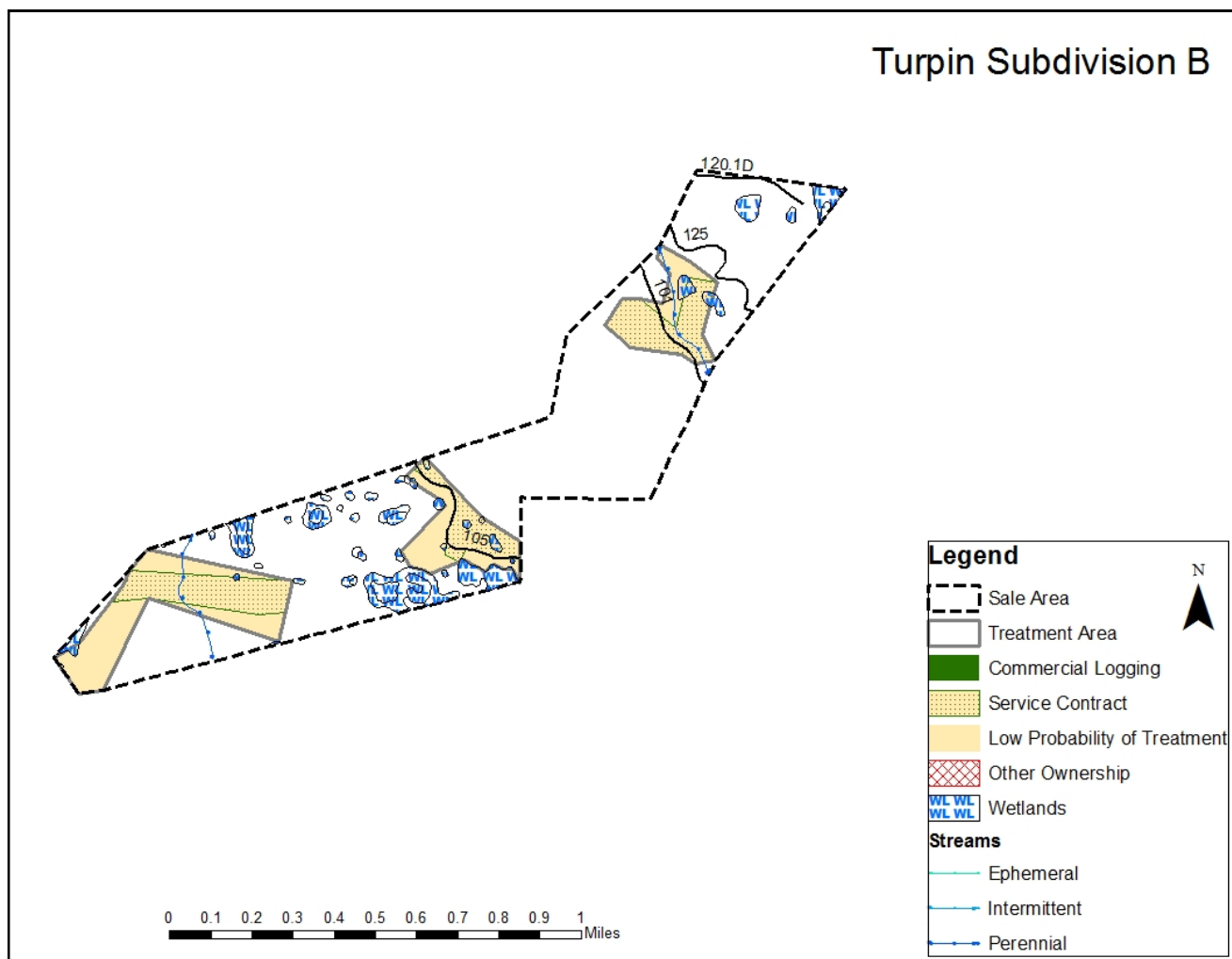


Figure 3. Turpin Subdivision B

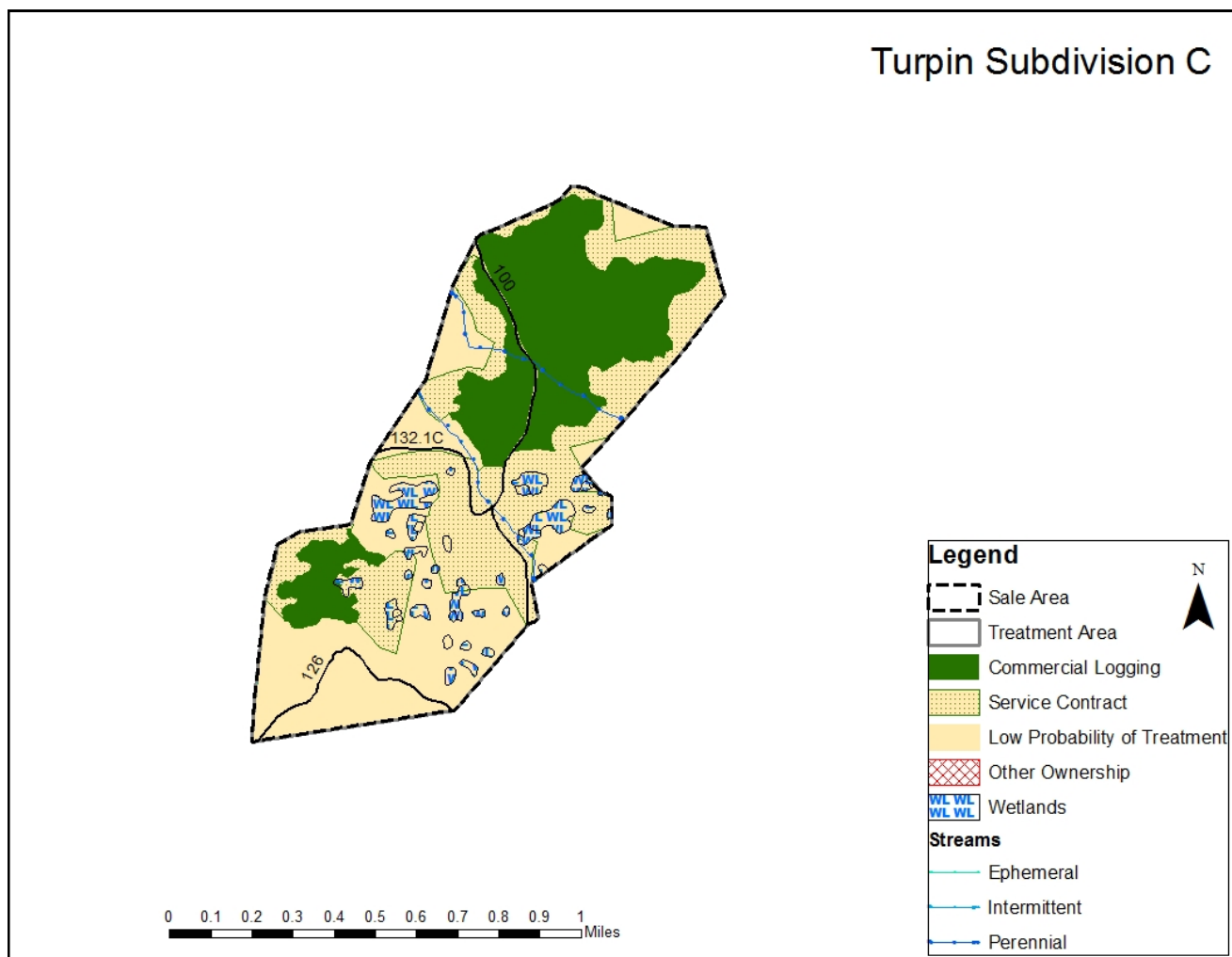


Figure 4. Turpin Subdivision C.

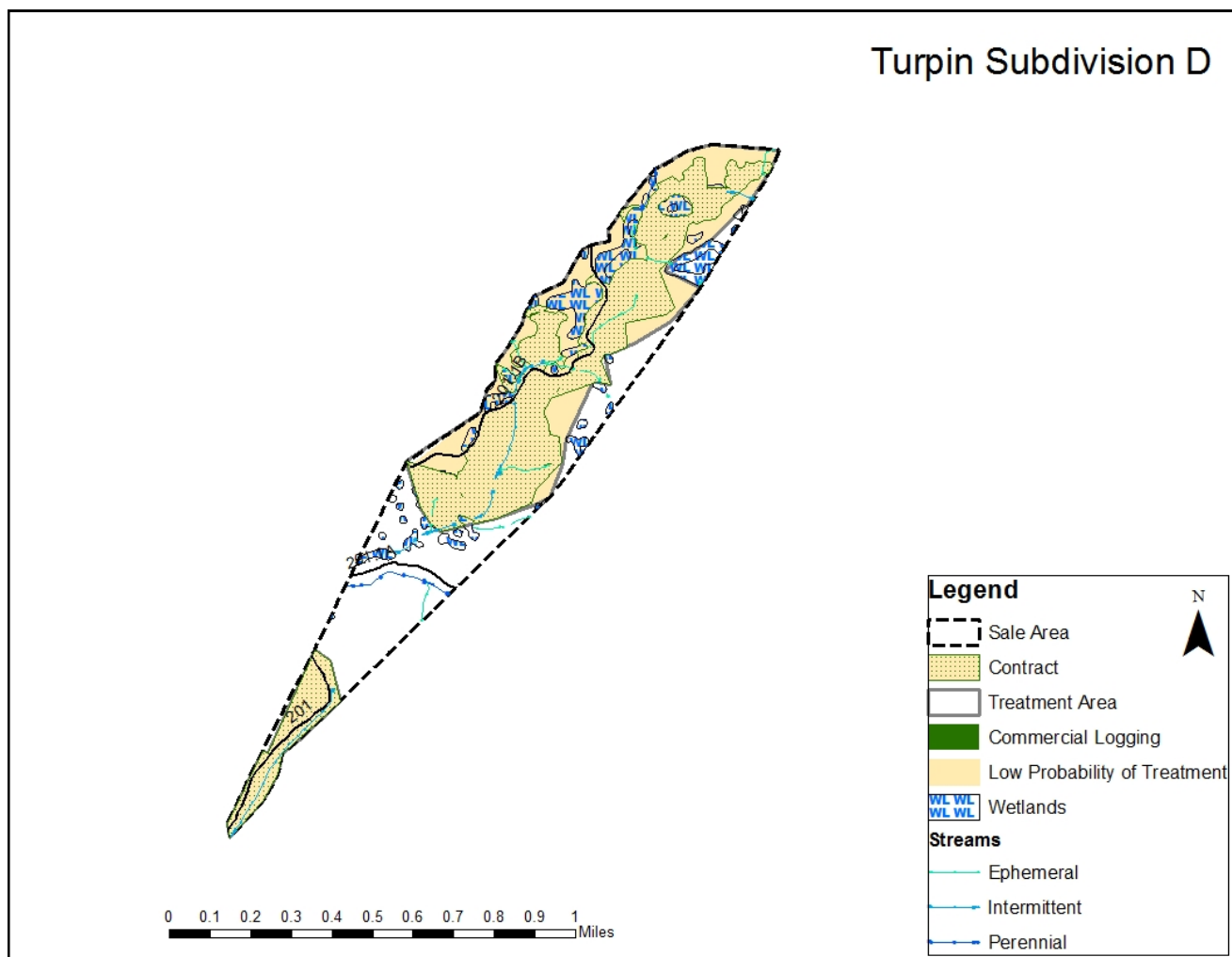


Figure 5. Turpin Subdivision D.

APPENDIX A

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Aquatics	
#1	In consultation with fisheries staff, develop site-specific design criteria to ensure protection of boreal toad and wood frog habitat and populations. Areas that have been identified will have a 300 foot buffer.
#2	Treatment units within the kettle ponds SAI, which is habitat for the wood frog, will be treated by hand crews only with no mechanized equipment.
#3	To the extent possible, located temporary roads outside SMZs. Temporary roads that are within SMZs will be coordinated with a Hydrologist, Fish Biologist and/or Soil Scientist and approved by the District Ranger.
#4	To discourage amphibians from using slash piles as refuge, avoid placing slash piles within 100' of SMZs.
Botany	
#1	Threatened, Endangered, R2 Sensitive and local concern plant species (SOLC) will be subject to a limited action buffer (typically 30 to 100 feet), in which heavy equipment will be prohibited and timber harvest may be limited, unless otherwise agreed upon by the Botanist and District Ranger. Specific buffer distances and allowable activities will depend on plant and habitat characteristics and will be determined at time of discovery.
#3	Where appropriate, seed or otherwise revegetate disturbed areas with native species to reduce risk of invasive species establishment. Coordinate with a Botanist or Rangeland Management Specialist to identify appropriate species for planting.
#4	Equipment from unknown locations or locations known to have noxious weeds will be washed prior to being allowed onto the project area.
Range	
#1	Equipment from unknown locations or locations known to have noxious weeds will be washed prior to being allowed onto the project area.
Soils	
#1	Rehabilitate temporary roads, skid trails, and landings within three years after their final use, unless identified as necessary for post-harvest activities.
#2	Where feasible, limit burn piles not located on landings or designated slash disposal areas to approximately 300 square feet; rehabilitate burn piles by spreading out remains where applicable.
#3	In units with designated skid trails, maintain a 75 ft spacing between trails except where they converge.
#4	If mechanical site prep is needed work with Soil Scientist to determine specific needs for soil protection.
#5	Scarify compacted areas of temporary roads, landings, and skid trails. Work with soil scientist to determine specific needs to de-compact areas.
#6	No equipment operations on wet ground when a basic soil test indicates that soil is wet and susceptible to compaction. Winter operations will be allowed when frozen conditions exist. Frozen conditions exist when there are 4 inches or more of frozen ground or 12 inches or more of packed snow or a combination of compactable snow and frozen soil of 12 inches or more.
#7	No Ground-based equipment operations on slopes greater than 40% unless coordinated with a soil scientist for considerations of slope stability. Where slopes within an activity area contain short pitches greater than 40 percent, but less than 150 feet in length, ground-based equipment may be allowed, as designated by the timber sale administrator.

Fire/Fuels	
#1	In areas treated within 200 yards of existing structures or within 150 feet of existing/open roads, pile and burn slash, or remove it from the treated area to increase the effectiveness of these areas as fuels breaks by minimizing rates of spread, and fireline intensity in the event of wildfire.
#2	In all other treatment areas ensure that residual slash does not exceed a depth of 24" in any areas to ensure that rate of spread, fireline intensity, and burn severity remain at desirable levels in the event of wildfire.
#3	Coordinate placement of slash piles at landings or other locations will be constructed compact and dirt free to facilitate complete burning. Minimum machine pile size is 10 by 10 by 10 feet. Hand piles will be constructed in a half-paraboloid shape with the height of the pile being greater than the width and length and will have smaller diameter fuels piled in the center of the pile to ensure the material is easily consumed when burning.
Recreation	
#1	Coordinate with Recreation Specialist well in advance of planned operations to allow for any possible trail closures or reroutes
#2	Do not skid on trails unless coordinated with Recreation Specialist.
Engineering	
#1	All timber sale projects must be reviewed by Engineering personnel prior to project implementation to determine if a road package is necessary.
#2	Signs, gates, cattle guards and other improvements damaged or removed during harvest activities will be replaced or paid for.
#3	Temporary traffic control measures would be implemented for public safety in accordance with Forest Service signing policy and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
Hydrology	
#1	Identify a minimum 100 foot streamside management zone around all perennial and intermittent streams, wetlands, lakes, and ponds. Prohibit ground-based equipment from entering SMZs unless approved by a hydrologist.
#2	Limit the equivalent disturbance from past/present/future timber and fuels treatments that reduce conifer basal area so that the equivalent clearcut area does not exceed 25%. If there is a need to increase treated acres in a watershed by more than the amount allowable to stay below 25%, have a hydrologist conduct an on-site evaluation of the potential for the total disturbance to affect long-term stream health; limit disturbance as needed to maintain long-term stream health
#3	To the extent possible, utilize existing road templates or pre-existing unauthorized route prisms in lieu of creating new temporary road prisms.
#4	To the extent possible, incorporate obliteration of non-system routes as priority projects in KV plans or as priority stewardship projects. Prioritize routes within 300 feet of streams, wetlands or riparian areas.
Wildlife	
#1	
#2	
#3	

MONITORING

Implementation monitoring includes pre-activity surveys to monitor the status of raptor nests in the project area, presence of noxious weed species, and/or condition of range improvement. Monitoring is conducted during implementation to evaluate applicability and conformance with specific design elements and to administer other contractual or regulatory requirements, including utilization standards, temporary road reclamation, smoke dispersal for slash burning, or stream turbidity during road work or obliteration. Longer term monitoring includes identification and treatment of new or expanded noxious weed occurrences and regeneration surveys to assure adequate restocking of desired tree species.

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U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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